

## **PREVENTING AND MITIGATING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA**

### **Legislative proposals**

#### **I. Making the first year of life a success.**

A. Findings: The first three years of life are critical to the success of the parent-child relationship, the development of a child's system of emotional regulation, building a foundation for the next 10 years or so of rapid, critical brain development, and the lifetime resiliency and health of the child.

B. The public policy: Communities must have the resources to educate and support new mothers whose circumstances put them at risk.

C. Mechanisms: school-based education for expectant mothers; the visiting nurse's program; peer support, respite services and other ways of bringing a community of support into the home.

#### **II. Building trauma-informed systems:** state services and institutions, including juvenile justice and corrections; schools; private providers

A. Findings: Adverse childhood experiences are common, occur in clusters, and are very strongly correlated with poor health outcomes later in life, among other negative outcomes such as criminal justice system involvement.

B. The public policy: State-operated and state-funded systems of care must know how to prevent trauma, recognize it's symptoms, and mitigate its effects.

C. Mechanisms: training, legislative policy statements, reporting on efforts

#### **III. Stopping re-traumatization of kids by state services**

A. Findings:

1. The child protective services system: unqualified and poorly trained workers; sloppy assessments; reporters have no process for appealing for reconsideration; lack of accountability to the community.

2. The foster care system: children are removed from their homes after inadequate efforts to support the family, foster families are not given the skills or support they need, multiple placements are the norm, kinship placements are poorly monitored

3. Adoption has high rates of failure: families are poorly trained and supported for the challenge children whose emotional development has been stunted by abuse or neglect.

B. The public policy: Montana will learn to support at-risk families better and build a foster care system that has the skills and determination to address the most

challenging characteristics of abused and neglected children and that refuses to let them fail.

C. Legislative mechanisms: enhanced foster care provider training requirements and funding for them; enhanced training on how to support families and the wraparound service model, and funding for support of at-risk families; require CPS workers to possess professional credentials; require a system of training, testing and—very importantly—supports for CPS workers to address secondary trauma; create local, regional and statewide oversight boards that can address CPS performance at those levels and advocate to the Department and the Legislature; **fund wraparound services and supports for at-risk families with general fund appropriations**; require Department to report on efforts and outcomes; invite new Governor to make reform a priority; consider study resolution to continue this effort in next biennium.

#### IV. Taking the challenge to the community

- A. Findings: There are so many forces at work in our communities that put young families at risk but there are also many people who want to help.
- B. Public policy: State government will partner with communities to develop local resources to support at-risk children and families.
- C. Mechanisms: develop criteria for funding local initiatives that support at-risk children and families, based on criteria that include strong local leadership and collaboration, matching funding or in-kind donations, and realistic plans; appropriate funding; require state agencies to work collaboratively to support local efforts. (There is an existing model for this kind of state local partnership in the HB 130 grants.)